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101139Z Mar 06

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 000981

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XOX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
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USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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11. Mideast

12. Iran: Nuclear Program

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Key stories in the media:  
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The lead stories in all three major Hebrew-language newspapers focus on interviews with Acting PM Ehud Olmert. (The Jerusalem Post also conducted an interview with him.) Ha'aretz highlighted Olmert's statement that he plans to open an "internal dialogue" with the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories if he wins the elections, in an effort to reach an agreement about Israel's withdrawal line in the West Bank. Ha'aretz quoted Olmert as saying that he plans to offer the settler leaders a deal: convergence into the large settlement blocs and the expansion of those blocs, and evacuation of those settlements beyond whatever border is set. Government investments beyond the Green Line would match the future map. Similarly, Olmert was quoted as saying in his interview with Yediot that Israel will establish a new border, on the other side of which there will be no Israelis. Yediot also quoted Olmert as saying that anyone involved in terrorist attacks is a legitimate target for assassination. Olmert was referring to Palestinian PM-designate Ismail Haniyeh. Maariv highlighted a remark made by Olmert that Jerusalem will not necessarily retain its current borders. In the interviews, Olmert criticized the Likud's campaign methods against him.

All media quoted former IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon as saying in a speech at the Hudson Institute in Washington that the IDF could overcome the Iranian air defense system and carry out several dozen air strikes. The media reported that Israeli military and political sources sharply condemned Ya'alon's remarks. Israel Radio quoted Olmert as saying in an interview with Reka, its station directed at immigrants, principally from the Former Soviet Union, that idle talk is superfluous. Major media reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told reporters in Germany on Wednesday that Israel had all it needed to defend itself against Iran. The Jerusalem Post reported that a senior Defense Ministry official told the newspaper that the US has until now not done enough to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. The official reportedly expressed hope that Wednesday's referral of the Iranian issue to the UN Security Council would prove to be effective.

Israel Radio and Ha'aretz web site reported that Mofaz decided this morning that the IDF will impose a full closure on the West Bank and Gaza from Saturday night until Wednesday, due to fears of terror attacks during the Purim holiday and ahead of the March 28 elections.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a senior officer of

the Civil Administration in the territories told the newspaper on Thursday that while Hamas does not plan to dismantle its armed wing and a third Intifada is on the horizon, Israel will eventually have to backtrack from its refusal to deal with a PA that Hamas controls. The officer was quoted as saying that "reality on the ground" will force pragmatism on Hamas.

Israel Radio quoted Meretz-Yahad Chairman Yossi Beilin as saying that his party will not join the government coalition if the government intends to build in the E1 area.

Leading media reported that high-level meetings held between Fatah and Hamas representatives on Thursday did not bring forth any results regarding a Palestinian national union government.

Major media reported that on Thursday, Foreign Ministry DG Ron Prosor met with Jordanian PM Maruf al-Bakhit. Ha'aretz quoted GOI sources as saying that the meeting was not intended to diffuse tension between Israel and Jordan following remarks by O/S Central Command Yair Naveh about the future of the Hashemite ruling dynasty. Other media reported that the meeting was aimed at resolving the crisis between the two countries. Maariv quoted government sources in Jerusalem as saying that the purpose of the visit was to agree on the price Israel would have to pay following the crisis. Ha'aretz reported that Jordan initially demanded Naveh's dismissal but downgraded their demand when Israel balked. Hatzofe reported that the Jordanian Interior Minister has instructed Jordanian civil servants to obtain advance permits to visit Israel. Hatzofe quoted GOI sources as saying that the move would make cooperation with Jordan much more difficult.

Former senior Pentagon official Richard Perle was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that the Iraqis will eventually prove to the world that they want and can live in a democracy.

Ha'aretz reported that Palestinians working for international organizations will have to have entry permits to enter the "seam line" area extending from the separation fence to the Green Line. The newspaper reported on tension between the international organizations and the Israeli defense establishment.

Major media quoted nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu in an interview with BBC-TV that in the 1960s, the UK provided Israel with plutonium and chemicals with which nuclear weapons 20 times the power of the Hiroshima A-bomb could be made.

The Jerusalem Post reported that several Israeli groups praised the United States' most recent human rights report for bringing more attention to Israeli abuses they have long campaigned against.

Major media reported that the GOP-dominated House Appropriations Committee voted to bar Dubai Ports World (DPW), which is run by the government of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, from holding leases or contracts at US ports. Leading media cited the White House that President Bush is open to compromise but would not retreat from a threatened veto of legislation on the issue.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel's media barons, concerned that Google's latest venture, a Hebrew version of Google News, will bite into their business, have decided to fight the new initiative.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that the Jewish Agency's education department will sponsor election analysis, the latest exit polls, and live feed from Israeli television dubbed into English, that will be made available on the Internet during election night, March 28. The newspaper lists an Internet address: <http://masaisrael.org/globalvote/> for more information or to register.

Yediot reported that more than 94 Israeli artists working in various media -- including the Acting PM's wife Aliza Olmert -- will present their work at an Israeli art week that will take place in New York in the coming week.

Maariv printed the results of a TNS/Teleseker Polling Institute survey conducted among immigrants from the Former Soviet Union:  
- "Who among the following candidates is most suitable to become the next prime minister?" Avigdor Lieberman: 34 percent; Binyamin Netanyahu: 21 percent; Ehud Olmert: 17 percent; Amir Peretz: 2 percent.

-Based on the assumption that the vote of new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union would amount to 18 Knesset seats, the survey's results indicate that the new immigrants would bring eight mandates to Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, 5 to 6 mandates to Kadima, 2 to 3 mandates to Likud, and 0.5 to 1 mandate to the Labor Party.

The Jerusalem Post quoted the results of a poll conducted among Russian immigrants on behalf of the newspaper by the Smith Institute: 35 percent favor Yisrael Beiteinu; some 20 percent support Kadima; and another 17 percent favor the Likud. Only 4 percent are likely to vote for Labor.

The Jerusalem Post cited a survey presented at a conference Thursday about the trends of the Arab voters at the University of Haifa, according to which two-thirds of Israeli Arabs were pleased with Hamas's win, but that even more (69.5 percent) believe Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state.

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I. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Olmert's implication that he tends toward a more minimalist map ... is disturbing.... What incentive do the Palestinians have to end their war with us if they receive the same territories in any case?"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "In backing Kadima, a party committed to transferring lands and money to the Hamas-led PA, the US has effectively made strengthening the Iranian-backed Hamas its central aim in the region."

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The organizations of the radical left have long ceased to be human-rights groups."

Block Quotes:  
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I. "Olmert's Specifics"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 10): "While holding open the possibility that Hamas will bow to the conditions set by Israel and the international community regarding combating terrorism and accepting Israel, the thrust of [Ehud Olmert's] plan assumes the opposite: that the road map will be a dead letter, that Israel has been freed from its constraints -- including those inherited from Oslo -- and that the US can be persuaded to support Israel acting unilaterally on 'final-status' issues. Whether this logic makes sense is precisely what the voters will be deciding in this election. It would be good, however, to know if he really thinks that Israel can establish a permanent border unilaterally. It is perhaps wise to act as if this were the case for the purpose of establishing the strongest possible negotiating position. But we should not confuse ourselves. Any border determined unilaterally must leave room to negotiate, unless Israel plans to live indefinitely without a full and formal peace agreement with its neighbors. In this context, Olmert's implication that he tends toward a more minimalist map -- one that does not include the Jordan Valley, its western slopes, and other groups of settlements -- is disturbing.... What incentive do the Palestinians have to end their war with us if they receive the same territories in any case?"

II. "Kadima Vs. Israel"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in The Jerusalem Post (March 10): "In backing Kadima, a party committed to transferring lands and money to the Hamas-led PA, the US has effectively made strengthening the Iranian-backed Hamas its central aim in the region. From this it becomes apparent that Kadima's party interests are diametrically opposed to Israel's national interests. What the adamant public opposition to the Dubai deal shows is that regardless of how the administration may presently be treating Israel, if Israel elects a different government this month, the administration will not be able to easily oppose it if it decides to actually advance Israel's national interests for a change. Indeed, as is the case with the DPW deal, if a

new Israeli government projects a powerful image in Washington, accompanied by a dedication to the goal of ending the Palestinian war in victory, not surrender, the American people will intuitively support it and force the administration to support it as well."

### III. "Human Rights or the Elimination of Zionism"

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 10): "One can -- and even must -- debate the means that Israel is allowed to use in its confrontation with a hostile population. It is possible and legitimate to create a debate about targeted assassinations and checkpoints. It is certainly allowed to expose actions that have nothing to do with protecting Israelis, but mostly are humiliations of Palestinians.... The organizations of the radical left have long ceased to be human-rights groups.... In the past few years, part of the 'human-rights' organizations have turned into support groups for the more extreme Palestinian ideology, which wants the 'Zionist process' to be erased."

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#### 12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

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##### Summary:

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Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Revelations [about a secret Iranian nuclear program] arouse concern that the political process led by the United States against Iran will not be sufficient to remove the serious threat to the security of Israel and the entire region."

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in Ha'aretz: "Even as the [US administration's] message was sharp and uniform at AIPAC, elsewhere, in Vienna, New York, and Washington, it was a week of obfuscation and maneuvering."

##### Block Quotes:

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### I. "Achievement in the Shadow of Threat"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 10): "The diplomatic effort to halt Iran's nuclear program took a step forward Wednesday with the referral of the issue to the UN Security Council, which will discuss the matter next week. The US administration chalked up a political achievement when, after an extended effort, it brought about the referral of the 'Iranian case' from the hands of the International Atomic Energy Agency to the Security Council, which can impose sanctions on recalcitrant countries. There is still a long way to sanctions, especially due to the opposition of Russia, which is worried about a confrontation and continues to search for compromise formulas. But the process completed this week expresses increasing agreement in the international community that Iran is indeed trying to obtain nuclear weapons and has therefore systematically violated its commitments and deceived the IAEA.... According to Zeev Schiff's article in Thursday's Ha'aretz, Iran is suspected of establishing secret plants outside the realm of IAEA supervision and reporting, in which nuclear research and development, in several fields, is underway.... The revelations arouse concern that the political process led by the United States against Iran will not be sufficient to remove the serious threat to the security of Israel and the entire region. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, hinted at this when he told the AIPAC conference the United States would use 'all the tools' at its disposal to stop the Iranian threat."

### II. "Washington: Clarity"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in Ha'aretz (March 10): "The Iranian problem, a senior [US] administration official told Ha'aretz this week, is disturbing the entire region. The administration is holding talks on the subject with friends of the US in the Persian Gulf, in Egypt, 'with all the players in the region.' He said that there is an 'American-Arab-Israeli consensus' on the Iranian issue. A rare sight. However, even as the message was sharp and uniform at AIPAC, elsewhere, in Vienna, New York, and Washington, it was a week of obfuscation and maneuvering."